



Fact Sheet #4: Talking to Your Neighbors

Living in Community Takes Communication

Issues, big and small such as noise complaints and parking restrictions, can come up between neighbors anywhere. When your neighbor is a person with a disability living in their own home or in a “group home”, it may complicate the situation. Having open, respectful conversations can help resolve concerns before they escalate—and help build understanding.

Before You Speak:

- **Check Your Intentions:** Are you trying to solve a problem or just venting? Go in with a mindset of curiosity and collaboration.
- **Make Sure It's a Good Time:** Don't approach neighbors during a crisis or when emotions are high.
- **Bring Empathy:** Neighbors may have a natural curiosity about who's living next door. Stereotypes may create fear and anxiety.

When You're the Neighbor:

- **Be Direct but Respectful:** “I understand that the incident last week where police and paramedics had to come was hard on everyone, but I want to talk about the damage the person did to my mailbox during that incident and how to avoid it from happening again”.
- **Don't Make Sweeping Generalizations:** Are “all staff from the group home always parking in front of the fire hydrant” OR did “the staff who worked overnight last weekend with the blue car park in front of the fire hydrant”?
- **Stick to the impact:** “When you leave your trash cans out for days, the snowplow is not able to do its job”.
- **Don't Make Assumptions:** Just because someone needs the added support of a group home, it doesn't mean they are unable to be left alone at times.
- **Give It a Chance:** Residents of group homes are part of the community too. Building relationships helps reduce fear and stigma. Talk to them like you would any neighbor.

When You're the Provider or Staff Member:

- **Know What You Can Say:** Due to privacy laws (HIPAA, data privacy), you cannot share specific details about residents (e.g., diagnoses, backgrounds, etc.).
- **Refer to Leadership:** If the concern goes beyond your role, offer the contact information of a supervisor or administrator.



- **Acknowledge Valid Concerns:** Some actions of group home residents or staff may impact the quality of life of neighbors. For things like noise or property upkeep, commit to solutions when possible and seek support from company leadership.
- **Don't Avoid the Conversation:** Working with people with disabilities is rewarding but sometimes challenging. Service providers are professionals who need to be able to receive critical feedback and make adjustments.

Tips for Everyone:

- Speak face-to-face when possible
- Avoid confrontation during or right after a crisis
- Assume good intentions
- Be solution-focused
- Follow up if things improve or worsen
- Remember that the goal is to build a neighborhood where everyone feels safe, respected, and heard.

When Conversations Don't Work:

If respectful conversation doesn't resolve the issue:

- If it is a group home, contact the **provider's leadership**
- Reach out to the city, **county**, or **licensing agency to learn about how to file formal complaints (See "Fact Sheet 2: What Are Group Homes" for resources)**
- If a serious safety issue arises, call **911**